



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

EMERSON'S VIEWS OF SOCIETY AND REFORM.*

Emerson is commonly thought of as one of our chief men of letters, perhaps also as a prophet of religion—but his relation to reform is sometimes lost sight of. Yet he was one of the chief influences for reform in the second quarter of the last century. An early lecture in Boston was called “Democratic-locofoco” throughout, and put Mr. George Bancroft, then Collector of the Port there, into such ecstasies that he invited him to come and address a Democratic mass-meeting—indeed, a grave Whig-looking gentleman could only account for the lecture on the supposition that Emerson wanted a place in the Custom-house.

Emerson's essential sympathies were all with the rising tide of democratic and social (if not socialistic) feeling that make the better part of the political history of that time. Even in England in 1848—a momentous year for Europe—he spoke of the man of honor as being by tendency, like all magnanimous men, a democrat. “The instinct of the people is right,” he said later, and he quoted a French deputy with approval, “March without the people, and you march into night.” He thought with Fisher Ames that a republic was better than a monarchy, even though, in contrast to a monarchy, which is like a merchantman that sails well, it is like a raft, on which your feet are always in water; the raft will never sink, while the merchantman may strike a rock and go to the bottom. With all his personal reserve and “superficial coldness,” Emerson knew that a life out of touch with the common life was not wholesome; he criticised the Transcendentalists for their “solitary and fastidious manners,” and likened some of them who wanted to put away their “uncles and aunts” in a village by themselves, to those who should put the dough in one pan and the yeast in another. In the Phi Beta Kappa address of 1837, which Dr. Holmes called

*An address at the Emerson Memorial Meeting, the University of Chicago, May 25, 1903.

"our intellectual Declaration of Independence," he almost anticipated Mr. Howells in saying, "The literature of the poor, the feelings of a child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of household life, are the topics of the time. It is a great stride. . . . I ask not for the great, the remote, the romantic; what is doing in Italy or Arabia; what is Greek art or Provencal minstrelsy; I embrace the common, and explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds." When (with others) he founded *The Dial*, he proposed that it should not be "a mere literary journal," but that it should go straight into life and lead the opinion of the generation on property, government, education, as well as on art, letters and religion.

In fact, the reforming impulse was deep in Emerson. His view of religion itself led that way. Religion, he said, no longer tended to a *cultus*, but to a heroic life. He called the reformers of his day "the visible church of the existing generation." "The leaders of the crusades against War, Negro Slavery, Intemperance, Government based on force, Usages of Trade, Court and Custom-house oaths, and so on to the agitators on the subject of Education and the laws of Property, are," he said, "the right successors of Luther, Knox, Robinson, Fox, Penn, Wesley and Whitefield. They have the same virtue and vices, the same noble impulse and the same bigotry." Probably no one has done more toward shifting religion towards its proper domain of right and justice and all manly virtue than Emerson. His saying is well-known, "The mind of this age has fallen away from the theology to morals. I conceive it an advance."

Emerson had no prejudices against wealth—he said, "man is by constitution expensive and needs to be rich." He liked the merchants he met with in his lecture-trips to the West—they seemed to have more manly power of all kinds, he remarked, than scholars. At the same time he thought the question of how wealth was got, legitimate. He could not agree to our American contraction of ethics to the one duty of paying money—so that if you pay it, you may play the

tyrant at discretion and never look back to the fatal question, Where had you the money that you paid? Wealth got by denying freedom stirred him to the core. He was the first American scholar, Mr. Conway says, to cast a dart at the Python of slavery. Even while in the pulpit, he allowed anti-slavery speakers to come there. In 1846, when a negro had been seized in Boston and carried back to slavery, and commerce and wealth seemed to breathe freer, he said, "It is high time our bad wealth came to an end." Again and again he spoke his mind, and when the Fugitive Slave law was passed, he declared not only that it must be abrogated, but that while it stood it must be disobeyed. Such was his indignation that it moved him for once in his life to personal denunciation—and this of a man for whom he had had great admiration, Daniel Webster. When the war came, he was overheard to say once in the Charlestown Navy Yard, "Sometimes gunpowder smells good." Lowell testifies to the high influence he had on the young men who went into the war—and Mr. John J. Chapman says it will not be denied that he sent ten thousand sons there.

But even wealth got under our general system of trade was not quite without taint, in Emerson's eyes; for this system (apart from blacker traits that are exceptional and are commonly denounced) is, he says, a system of selfishness, does not spring from the high sentiments of human nature, is not measured by the exact law of reciprocity (much less by the sentiments of love and heroism), but is a system of distrust, of concealment, of superior keenness, not of giving but of taking advantage. He charges no class, merchant or manufacturer—everybody partakes, everybody confesses, he says, and nobody feels responsible. Particularly does he find the common treatment of "working people" lamentable. See, he says, this wide society of laboring men and women. "We allow ourselves to be served by them, we live apart from them, and meet them without a salute in the streets. We do not greet their talents, nor rejoice in their good fortune, nor foster their hopes, nor in the assembly of the people vote for what is dear to them. Thus we enact the part of the self-

ish noble and king from the foundation of the world." There were sensitive, ingenuous youth in his day who, not liking the ways of trade, came forth from it. But, says Emerson, by coming out of trade you do not clear yourself. The trail of the serpent reaches into all the lucrative professions and practices of man. Each has its own wrongs. Each finds a tender and very intelligent conscience a disqualification for success. Each requires of the practitioner a certain shutting of the eyes, a certain dapperness and compliance, an acceptance of customs, a sequestration from the sentiment of generosity and love. Yes, Emerson finds the evil custom reaching into the whole institution of property, until our laws which establish and protect it seem, he says, not to be the issue of love and reason, but of selfishness. Love and universal rights are so truly the standard to him that he takes it as matter of course that if another man has no land, my title to mine, your title to yours, is at once vitiated. Grimly, he says, the same spirit accuses men of driving a trade in the great boundless providence which has given the air, the water, and the land to men, to use and not to fence in and monopolize.

And Emerson not only spoke, he acted or tried to act in his private circle, from the higher ideas. He was troubled over domestic service—he was uneasy at being waited on at table in the ordinary one-sided way; he made an attempt to have all the members of his household sit together—but the cook spoiled the plan; "a cook was never fit to come to table," etc., she said. He was extremely considerate of all his hired help, wincing visibly when they were reprovéd and always respecting their holidays. He also made an attempt at co-operative housekeeping, being, as he said, a bit of an agrarian at heart and having become a little impatient of the inequalities around him—wishing either that he had a smaller house or else that it sheltered more persons. The proposition was made to the Alcotts—but Mrs. Alcott declined; and so another plan was foiled. He even undertook the experiment of manual labor, on which he was setting much store in his lectures. But after trying it, he concluded,

"The writer shall not dig"—not that he may not work in the garden, as Emerson had always done, but that his stay there must be measured by the needs not of the garden, but of the study. "When the terrestrial corn, beets, onions and tomatoes flourish," he wrote a friend, "the celestial archetypes do not." And so he frankly owned that if he judged from his experience he should have to unsay all his fine things about the manual labor of literary men.

But sympathetic as he was with the new ethical spirit and acquiring new scruples himself, Emerson was chary of joining associations or organized movements, and never became, in the technical sense, a reformer. He was strongly drawn to the Brook Farm community; he gave "earnest attention and much talk" to the subject—we find him writing at one time that he had not decided "not to go;" but later he wrote Mr. Ripley, the leader in the enterprise, that he had concluded, "yet very slowly," and he might almost say, "with penitence" not to join. In the main his feeling was that he had a work of his own to do in life and that the work might suffer if he joined the community—yet he wrote in his journal, "I approve every wild action of the experimenters." It was not timidity, conservatism, or unbelief that held him back, but the conviction that he must serve men after his own genius. Truth to himself, to his own ideas—this was his supreme need, and when we consider what the range and nobility of those ideas were, we are content that he chose to stand alone and pour them forth unhindered and uncompromised. The various reforms were partial, men who immersed themselves in them lost the sense of proportion—he wished to stand for the whole of duty and the whole of man. Let not the abolitionist, he said, "exaggerate by his pity and blame the outrage of the Georgian or Virginian, forgetful of his own town and neighborhood, of himself." He did not think it exactly wholesome for Boston to be pushed into a false, showy, theatrical attitude, and persuaded that she was better than she really was. He saw that the North was not so different from the South after all. The planter does not want slaves, he said,—no, he wants his luxury, and he will pay even this

price for it. How then, he asks, will the abolitionist make a successful assault on that luxury save by abating his own?

Emerson saw deep into the whole labor problem—which is still a problem, though slave labor is abolished—when he said, “If I am selfish, then is there slavery, or the effort to establish it wherever I go.” The only real cure is a change of principles in the heart. When men are democratized, the sequel will flow easily out; but simply putting them in a phalanx (the co-operative or socialistic term of his day) they remaining unchanged, would not, he said, much mend matters—for so long as people want the things we now have and not better things, they will certainly, under whatever change of forms, keep the old system. The word is still pertinent. Character is the deepest thing in reform as everywhere else in life. Reforms and reformers as well as other things and people go to pieces for want of it. It is next to useless, Emerson thought, and I might say a bit nauseous as well, for a man not himself renovated, to attempt to renovate things about him. Emerson had high hopes for society, but they all rested on this deep basis of ethics or religion. He looked for a day of great equalities, though admitting that all our experience (or rather inexperience) was of inequalities. He could imagine the “cash-nexus,” which his friend Carlyle had found about the only bond holding present society together, superseded by bonds of love and justice. But it was these principles that were to regenerate, it was this unlocking of the heart, that was to give fresh life to man. Do you suppose, he asked, that the reforms which are preparing will be as superficial as those we know? No, he replied, there will dawn ere long a nobler morning in the sentiment of love. Here he found the remedy for all ills, the panacea of nature. We must be lovers, he said, and at once the impossible becomes the possible. He took comfort in the thought that this “great, overgrown, dead Christendom of ours keeps alive at least the name of a lover of mankind;” but, he said, “one day all men will be lovers, and every calamity will be dissolved in the universal sunshine.”

We may call this the language of rhapsody, and indeed it

is. Only it must be remembered that Emerson had a view of human nature which makes rhapsody possible and natural. To Emerson there were no limits to what man might do under the influence of ideas. The practical man urges that it is impossible to construct a heavenly society out of foolish, sick, selfish men and women; true enough, but these men and women may be transformed. Emerson says, "The believer not only beholds his heaven to be possible, but already to begin to exist—not by the men or materials the statesman uses, but by men transfigured and raised above themselves by the power of principles." Emerson judged actual men as keenly as Carlyle, but with all this, with his haughty, almost contemptuous, descriptions of the swarming masses in our great cities, with his flat assertion, "There is no man; there never hath been. The Intellect still asks that a man may be born," he held in faith to the men that might be, he could imagine the selfish man of business transformed, he could imagine the swarming masses, "hungers, thirsts, fevers, appetites walking," transformed. Once he notes the fact that of the sixty thousand men who made Napoleon's army at Eylau, some thirty thousand were thieves and burglars. The great general won his victories with the help of a class, whom in ordinary times we hold if we can in prisons, with iron at their legs. What a suggestion for the misfit and the unfit in our cities now—if an industrial leader, a leader with love and with brains, could arise and marshal them! We never know what is possible. Emerson pointed to the victories of the Mohammedan Arabs, who from a small beginning established a larger empire than that of Rome—"They did," he said, "they knew not what. The naked Derar, horsed on an idea, was found an overmatch for a troop of Roman cavalry. The women fought like men and conquered the Roman men." In truth, a fount of supernatural energy lies back of man, or, as Emerson puts it, "The soul of God is poured into the world through the thoughts of men."

Men lifted by thoughts, by principles—that is Emerson's hope. What is this but saying that reform takes us back to

religion? Believe me, young men and young women, there is still room for religion in the world, if it be real. From our ordinary surface selves, the selves that ordinary business deals with, that the ordinary statesman reckons with, that the ordinary church, alas! and even the ordinary reformer hardly knows better than to appeal to, it may be impossible to expect much. Matching selfishness against selfishness, might against might, man against man, will not work—even if men were equal (which they are not), it would not work. In this way regroupings may come in the world, but not much change. What the world needs is to be lifted to a new level—and only religion does that. Only what touches the depths of man lifts him to his possible heights—and converse with the depths, that is religion. I look for a religion once more that shall believe in the infinite in man, that shall teach the doctrine of the soul—and no one makes such and all divine possibilities credible like him whom we are honoring to-day, Ralph Waldo Emerson.

WILLIAM M. SALTER.

CHICAGO.

BETTING AND GAMBLING.*

I HAVE been asked to speak on the theory of the subject: its ethical aspect. For this purpose one ought to have a quite clear view of the meaning of one's terms, and such clear view is not very easy to obtain. "Bet," according to Dr. Skeat, is a mere contraction of "abet," to instigate or incite, and that is from the same root as "bait," to set dogs on, literally, to make to bite. When the sharper is caught in his own toils, it is a case of the biter bit. The meaning has changed its emphasis in the course of time. The idea of instigating or inciting another or others is in modern usage rather consequential to the idea of a bet than of its essence. There may be a bet without any result upon others than the two persons immedi-

*A paper read at a Conference of Schoolmasters, College Tutors and Lecturers, at Cambridge, January 9, 1903.